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KINSHASA FOR D. TITUS

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SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA -- JAMMEH'S WEST AFRICA POLICY

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR GEORGE W. HALEY FOR
REASONS 1.5 B/D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH HE HAS NOT DEVELOPED A COHERENT STRATEGY FOR WEST AFRICAN REGIONAL SECURITY, PRESIDENT JAMMEH WANTS TO BE A MORE VISIBLE PLAYER IN SUB-REGIONAL DIPLOMACY. NEVERTHELESS, JAMMEH IS KEEN ON DEVELOPING A REPUTATION AS AN INFLUENTIAL PEACE BROKER. WITH EFFORTS IN THE CASAMANCE STYMIED DUE TO SENEGALESE PRESIDENT WADE'S SPHINX-LIKE SILENCE TO BANJUL'S OVERTURES, JAMMEH PICTURES THE MANO RIVER AS HIS NEW WADING POOL. SINCE PRESIDENT TAYLOR VISITED BANJUL LATE MARCH, THE GAMBIA HAS BEEN MORE INVOLVED IN ECOWAS DELIBERATIONS AND IN BILATERAL CONTACTS WITH MONROVIA. THE SOPHOMORIC JAMMEH MAY BE OVER HIS HEAD AND WIND UP FLAILING IN THE MANO RIVER TURBULENCE. HIS INTERVENTION WILL LIKELY BE INEFFECTUAL AND MAY ADD CONFUSION TO A MATTER ALREADY FLUSH WITH TROUBLE. END SUMMARY.

THE PERSON AS POLICY

¶2. (C) THE GAMBIA HAS NO ARTICULATED SUB-REGION FOREIGN POLICY NOR STRATEGY. JAMMEH AND COHORTS HANDLE ISSUES ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS. THEY APPARENTLY HAVE EMBRACED THE WORKING ASSUMPTION THAT A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY WOULD NOT EXCEED THE SUM OF ITS COMPOSITE PARTS.

¶3. (C) THE LODESTAR OF GAMBIAN FOREIGN POLICY IS JAMMEH'S APPETITE FOR INFLUENCE, HIS DESIRE TO BE A SUB-REGIONAL PLAYER OF SOME ACCOUNT. BECAUSE THE GAMBIA IS SMALL, WEAK AND POOR, JAMMEH HAS FEW UTENSILS TO ACHIEVE HIS GOAL. THUS, HE HAS USED THE GAMBIA'S RELATIVE DOMESTIC STABILITY AND ITS INHERENT GEOPOLITICAL IMPUISSANCE TO WIGGLE HIMSELF INTO THE MOLD OF A PEACE BROKER. HOWEVER, CREATION OF A REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF DURABLE PEACE AND CONFLICT PREVENTION SEEMS LESS AN IMPERATIVE THAN BEING PERCEIVED AS A CHARISMATIC LEADER CAPABLE OF ENGINEERING DRAMATIC BREAKTHROUGHS. DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN POLICY ARE CONDUCTED IN THE REALM OF PERSONAL CONTACTS AND CHEMISTRY, NOT OBJECTIVE NATIONAL INTERESTS. DRUM ROLLS AND FANFARE LOOM MORE IMPORTANTLY THAN THE SUBSTANCE OF PEACE. THE BIRTHPLACE OF GAMBIAN FOREIGN POLICY SEEMS TO BE MORE INTESTINAL THAN INTELLECTUAL.

¶4. (C) THAT MILITARY CONFLICTS HAD VISITED GAMBIA'S IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS GAVE JAMMEH READY VENUES TO PRACTICE HIS BRAND OF PERSONALIZED DIPLOMACY. AFTER TRANSIENT SUCCESSES MEDIATING DISPUTES IN GUINEA-BISSAU AND THE CASAMANCE IN 1999, JAMMEH'S FOREIGN POLICY HAS FOUNDERED LATELY. HIS INFLUENCE IN BISSAU AND DAKAR HAS WANED SINCE THE ELECTIONS OF PRESIDENT YALA AND WADE, RESPECTIVELY. ALTHOUGH YALA AND WADE HAVE THEIR INTERNAL PROBLEMS AND THEIR DIFFERENCES WITH EACH OTHER, JAMMEH INCREASINGLY HAS BEEN THE ODD MAN OUT IN THIS PART OF THE WEST AFRICAN NEIGHBORHOOD.

15. (C) IN HIS LATEST ATTEMPT TO AVOID THIS DE FACTO ISOLATION, JAMMEH HAS COURTED NOUAKCHOTT AS EVINced BY HIS EARLY MAY VISIT TO MAURITANIA WHERE SEVERAL BILATERAL AGREEMENTS ON ECONOMIC COOPERATION WERE EXECUTED. IN PART THE DALLIANCE WITH NOUAKCHOTT IS A CLUMSY ATTEMPT TO MAKE DAKAR "JEALOUS" AND THUS PAY MORE ATTENTION TO BANJUL.

16. (C) JAMMEH REMAINS FOCUSSED ON MAXIMIZING HIS INFLUENCE IN THE CASAMANCE PEACE PROCESS. CONSEQUENTLY, WADE'S INSCRUTABILITY HAS BEEN TOUGH TO MAW. THE GAMBIA FEARs THAT WADE IS COMMUNICATING WITH MFDC MODERATES WHILE KEEPING THE GAMBIA OUT OF THE LOOP. CONSEQUENTLY, THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN WADE AND JAMMEH REMAINS PRIMARILY CENTRIFUGAL. THE MORE WADE SEEMS TO KEEP JAMMEH SIDELINED, THE MORE JAMMEH WANTS WADE TO FAIL. BECAUSE OF HIS SUSCEPTIBILITY TO VAULT INDIVIDUAL PIQUE OVER NATIONAL INTERESTS, JAMMEH MAY FEEL COMPELLED TO SYMPATHIZE WITH MFDC HARDLINERS AND THEIR MUSCLE-FLEXING REACTIONS TO WADE'S PEACE STRATAGEM. AS LONG AS WADE DOES NOT LET THE GAMBIA MEDIATE THE NEGOTIATIONS, JAMMEH'S ATTITUDE WILL BE ONE OF SCHADENFREUDE NOT OF STATESMANSHIP IN SCULPTING A GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY THAT ACTUALLY PROMOTES A CASAMANCE PEACE.

WADING INTO DEEP WATER - THE MANO RIVER FRAY

17. (C) DENIED HIS DESIRED ROLE IN THE CASAMANCE, JAMMEH NOW PEERS AT THE MANO RIVER IMBROGLIO AS A POTENTIAL VEHICLE TO SECURE HIS MANTLE AS PEACE BROKER. JAMMEH IS ALSO ENERGIZED BY THE BELIEF THAT HE HAS THE INSIDE TRACK ON THE ECOWAS CHAIR ONCE PRESIDENT KONARE COMPLETES THIS TERM. CURRENTLY, JAMMEH SEES NO BETTER WAY TO PREPARE HIMSELF FOR THIS ASCENSION THAN VISIBLE INVOLVEMENT IN THE MOST CRUCIAL ISSUE FACING THE SUB-REGION. PRESIDENT TAYLOR'S LATE MARCH VISIT TO BANJUL WAS NOT A WHIM. AGAINST THIS BACKDROP, TAYLOR LIKELY HAD TWO RELATED OBJECTIVES. FIRST, HE RECOGNIZED THAT JAMMEH MAY BE IN LINE FOR THE ECOWAS -- HE WANTED TO CULTIVATE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP PRIOR TO JAMMEH'S TENURE. SECOND, TAYLOR WANTED ECOWAS TO BE A DIVIDED HOUSE REGARDING SANCTIONS AGAINST LIBERIA. REALIZING THAT MOST ECOWAS COLLEAGUES ARE AGAINST HIM, TAYLOR SEEKS A SYMPATHETIC MINORITY TO PREVENT ECOWAS CONSENSUS WHICH, IN TURN, WILL IMPEDE ANTI-LIBERIA ACTION BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

18. (C) ALSO, THE COMMONALTIES BETWEEN THE TAYLOR AND JAMMEH CANNOT BE IGNORED. BOTH ARE DISLIKED BY IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS. BOTH BASICALLY ASSUMED POWER BY THE MUSKET AND THUS ARE BETE NOIRE TO THEIR COUNTRIES' POLITICAL INTELLIGENCIA. BOTH HAVE STRONG ANTI-WESTERN STREAKS AND LONG STANDING TIES TO LIBYA. TAYLOR AND BABA JOBE, ARGUABLY THE SECOND MOST POWERFUL FIGURE IN THE GAMBIA, TRAINED TOGETHER IN LIBYA IN THE 1980S. PREDICTABLY, JOBE IS ENMESHED IN ALL FORMS OF SKULLDUGGERY. WE SUSPECT TAYLOR AND HIS COMPANIONS MAY HAVE EXPLORED WITH JAMMEH AND JOBE THE USE OF THE GAMBIA AS A POSSIBLE BACK ALLEY FOR COMMERCE TO ESCAPE UN SANCTIONS. BABA JOBE'S ALMOST INNATE CRIMINALITY WOULD LEAD HIM TO ACCEPT SUCH AN OFFER. ALTHOUGH HE WOULD HAVE BEEN ATTRACTED BY ANY BANGLES AND TRINKETS TAYLOR MIGHT HAVE OFFERED, JAMMEH WOULD BE MORE CAUTIOUS THAN JOBE. NONETHELESS, THE DIPLOMATIC OPENING BETWEEN BANJUL AND MONROVIA PAVES THE ROAD FOR MORE CONTACTS AND THIS INCREASES THE CHANCE OF ILLICIT COMMERCE FOR THERE ARE FEW THINGS THAT THE LIBERIAN TOUCHES WHICH DO NOT BECOME SULLIED.

19. (C) ALREADY, THE GAMBIA'S VOCABULARY TOWARD

LIBERIA HAS CHANGED. MONTHS AGO, FM SEDAT JOBE WOULD IMPRECATE TAYLOR THE MOMENT THE LIBERIAN ISSUE WAS RAISED. DURING A MID-MAY CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR HALEY, JOBE GROANED THAT SANCTIONS AGAINST LIBERIA WERE INIMICAL TO PEACE. JOBE PROTESTED THAT TRAVEL SANCTIONS WERE PARTICULARLY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE BECAUSE THEY WOULD PREVENT TAYLOR FROM ATTENDING PEACE CONFERENCES. JOBE WENT SO FAR AS TO LABEL GUINEAN PRESIDENT CONTE, NOT TAYLOR, AS THE MAJOR OBSTACLE TO PEACE. (COMMENT: THAT JOBE WOULD UTTER SUCH AN IMPOVERISHED RATIONALE REVEALS THE EXTENT THAT HE HAS RECEIVED NEW MARCHING ORDERS REGARDING LIBERIA. END COMMENT.)

¶10. (C) THE GAMBIANS, SEEMINGLY OBLIVIOUS TO THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE TROUBLED MANO RIVER UNION, APPARENTLY BELIEVE THEY CAN SUCCEED WHERE OTHERS HAVE WRECKED -- IN DISCOVERING A FORMULA THAT WILL PERSUADE TAYLOR TO NEGOTI9E IN GOOD FAITH. THE FIRST STEP, ACCORDING TO THE GAMBIANS IS THE HOLDING OF A TAYLOR-CONTE SUMMIT AIMED AT PACIFICATION OF THE GUINEA-LIBERIA BORDER. CONSEQUENTLY THE GAMBIANS BLAME CONTE'S REFUSAL TO MEET TAYLOR AS THE MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK TO THEIR APPROACH. WE HAVE REMINDED THE GAMBIANS ABOUT THE NUMEROUS MEETINGS ATTENDED BY BOTH CONTE AND TAYLOR AND THE MANY COMMUNIQUEQS BOTH HAVE SIGNED. EVERY KNOWN PLATITUDE AND BROMIDE KNOWN TO DIPLOMATIC MAN HAS BEEN USED -- TO NO AVAIL. WE ADVISED THAT PUSHING FOR A SUMMIT IN THE ABSENCE OF ADEQUATE PREPARATORY WORK WOULD RAISE EXPECTATIONS UNDULY. DISAPPOINTMENT WAS INEVITABLE BECAUSE THE GULF BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERS IS MUCH TOO VAST TO BRIDGE IN ONE HIGHLY VISIBLE MEETING. INSTEAD, FOREIGN MINISTERS AND TECHNICAL EXPERTS NEED TO MEET TO LESSON THE DIFFERENCES AND IDENTIFY THOSE AREAS NEEDING PRESIDENTIAL RESOLUTION. JOBE SAID HE WOULD INCORPORATE THIS RECOMMENDATION IN THE GAMBIA'S APPROACH. WE WILL SEE.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: IN BOTH THE CASAMANCE AND THE MANO RIVER PROCESSES, THE GAMBIA SEEKS A DRAMATIC BREAKTHROUGH. JAMMEH'S EFFORTS ARE DRIVEN MORE BY HIS ITCH TO BE A STAR THAN HIS DESIRE TO BE A STATESMAN. THEREFORE, HE SEEKS TO MAKE A BIG SPLASH, GIVING SECONDARY CONSIDERATION TO WHETHER HE IS JUMPING INTO SAFE WATERS OR A HOT CAULDRON. EQUIPPED WITH NO REAL STRATEGY, JAMMEH'S EFFORTS LIKELY WILL NOT ADVANCE PEACE IN THE CASAMANCE NOR LIBERIA. UNFORTUNATELY, JAMMEH'S MEDDLING IN THE MANO RIVER FISTICUFFS WILL LIKELY SERVE TAYLOR'S AIMS. JAMMEH'S DIPLOMATIC EXPLOITS MAY CLOUD AND WEAKEN ANY ECOWAS POLICY CONSENSUS REGARDING SANCTIONS AGAINST LIBERIA. END COMMENT.

HALEY